BENTON

LETTER

LETTER FROM COL. BENTON

TO THE

PEOPLE OF MISSOURI.

CENTRAL NATIONAL HIGHWAY FROM THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER TO THE PACIFIC.

CITIZENS: The time has come when the long disputed question of a railroad to the Pacific ocean is assuming a practical form, and is about to receive its solution in the authoritative examination of the country, and the selection of the route. An appropriation has been made by Congress for the examinations, and the selection of the route is referred to the next Congress. This is well, and will give the CENTRAL route a fair chance, although the MEMPHIS, or SOUTHERN route has gained an immense advantage over it in the numerous surveys which have been made, and the long concentration of the public opinion upon it.

The Central route has been advocated by Col. Fremont for four years, and his preference for it publicly made known. From the time of his first survey of the (miscalled) SOUTH PASS he deemed that pass to be too far north for California: and subject to other objections; and, therefore, sought along the summit of the Rocky mountains, and along its base on both sides for Passes further south; and found them in several places in the THREE PARKS, and at head of the Arkansas. But he did not consider the examinations complete until he should search the head of the Rio Grande del Norte, where the information of the mountain men, and the course of the buffaloes, led him to expect to find the best Pass, and in the best country, and on the straightest line of communication between the central parts of the Valley of the Mississippi and the Bay of San Francisco.

This was the object of his last expedition, undertaken at his own expense, in the winter 1848–'49, after he had resigned his place in the army of the United States: and the event, though tardily, and after a great disaster, has realized all his expectations. Upon his arrival at TAOS and SANTA FE, after that disaster, every body could tell him (and especially Mr. Antoine Leroux) how near he had been to his object—that he was on the point of going through the fine Pass at the head of the valley of the Del Norte when

his guide, from a deplorable mistake, and against his convictions and remonstrances, turned him out of the valley, and led him upon the stupendous heights and deep snows of the Sierra San Juan. Though balked, and turned back, he had come near enough to his object to know it was there, and to know that it was passable in winter—and in that winter—which was one of the deepest and earliest snows ever known. He had crossed from the Upper Arkansas through the Sierra Blanca into the broad and rich valley at the head of the Del Norte which leads into the Pass, and had surmounted every obstacle that lay in his way. In three days, without crossing even a swell in the ground, or being able to detect the point of the divorce of the waters, he would have been on the west of the Rocky mountains, on the waters of the Great Colorado of the West, in a country of wood and grass, and in a climate comparatively mild: in fact he would have been there in less time than his guide got him to the place of his disaster. The information received at Taos and Santa Fe completed his knowledge both of this Pass and of the country beyond it, and left him perfectly satisfied in his own mind *that the true route was found*: and he communicated this important fact to the Railroad convention in Philadelphia, in April, 1850, in a letter, which was published; and also sent to the convention a sketch of the route indicated on a map.

Col. Fremont and I were both in Congress at that time, and immediately went to work to develope this route; but we both were left out of Congress that year, and the Central route lost its advocates, and disappeared from the view of Congress and the people; and has remained unnoticed for three years, while the Southern (Memphis) route has monopolized attention and acquired an engrossing prominence. But the time has arrived for the neglected route to appear upon the scene again, and in a form to secure for it a share of the public attention. The people of St. Louis Congressional district elected me to the House of Representatives last summer; and I came here to work during the winter; though not in the House. It has so happened that Mr. Antoine Leroux, the best qualified man in the world to speak on the subject, (not excepting the renowned Christopher Carson,) has arrived here also; and from him I have received the information, embodied in a formal statement, which establishes, not merely the practicable, but the easy and excellent character of the route, and which statement I herewith present:

Statement of Mr. Leroux.

At the request of Col. Benton, I, Antoine Leroux, native of St. Louis of Missouri, and now an inhabitant of Taos, in New Mexico, do make the following statement in relation to the Pass at the head of the valley of the Del Norte, and of the country on each side of that Pass; and also as to the best road from Missouri to California. And first tell how I got acquainted with the country:

In the year 1820, when I was in my nineteenth year, I joined Gen. Ashley and Major Henry in an expedition of hunting and trapping to the Upper Missouri and Rocky Mountains; and after near two years in that part I went to Taos, in New

Mexico, and afterwards married there, and have made it my home ever since; and from that place I carried on the business of a beaver trapper for about fifteen years, generally on the waters of the Great Colorado of the West; and have trapped the whole country, every river, creek, and branch from the Gila to the head of the Grand River fork of the Upper Colorado, and out to the Great Salt Lake, and on the waters of Wah-Satch Mountain, and out to the Virgen River, and have been four times to California, and guide to a great many American officers employed in Mexico, and know the country from New Mexico to California.

I will now describe the Pass.

At the head of the valley of the Del Norte there is a broad Pass about eight miles wide, called by the Utah Indians, *Coo cha-tope*, and by the Mexican Spaniards *El Puerto*, and which signifies in both languages *The Gap*, or the *Gate;* and has been known to the Spaniards ever since they settled in New Mexico, and by the Indians always. It is made by the *Sierra San Juan*, which comes up from the South on the west side of the Del Norte, *and gives out there;* and by the *Sierra Blanca*, which comes in from the east like it was going to join the San Juan, but turns off north round the head of the Arkansas and towards the Three Parks and is eight miles wide. Here between these two mountains is the Pass which goes out level from the valley of the Del Norte, (and looking like a continuation of it,) which leads to the upper waters of the Great Colorado of the West. The Del Norte does not head in this Pass, but in the San Juan Mountain, a little south of the Pass, where there is also a summer Pass, but none for the winter on account of the snow in it. There is a small creek in the Pass called by the same name, Coo-cha-tope, which comes out from the end of the San Juan and goes about eight miles east towards the Del Norte, but stops in a small lake, out of which a little stream gets to the Del Norte—which shows how level the country is. The Pass is heavily timbered with large pine trees, and with piñon; and there may be some small oaks, but I am not certain. There is not much snow in this Pass, and people go through all the winter; and when there is much snow in the mountains on the *Abiquiu* route, (which is the old Spanish Trail to California,) the people of Taos go round this way, and get into that trail in the forks of Grand and Green rivers. There are trails through it, but after you get through there are many trails, some going to the Abiquiu road, and some up or down the country. This Pass is laid down on a map I saw in the War Office, made by Lieut. Parke and Mr. R. H. Kern, and is there named after me, because I gave Lieut. Parke information about it. It is the only map I have seen that shows that Pass, and the best one I have seen of that part of the country, and with a little correction would be perfect.

As for the country on each side of the Pass, I will describe it, and on the east side first.

There is a large valley to the east about 50 or 60 miles wide and near 100 miles long, reaching from the Coo-cha-tope to the Taos settlements at the Little Colorado. The Del Norte runs through this valley, which is the widest and best valley in all New Mexico, and can hold more people than all New Mexico besides. It is all prairie except on the creeks, and on the river, and on the mountain sides, which are well wooded. It is a rich soil and covered with good grass, and wooded on all the streams. The Spaniards called it El Valle de San Luis, and it was formerly famous for wild hoses and buffaloes; and ever since Taos was settled by the Spaniards the inhabitants drove their sheep and cattle there to winter. Before the Utah Indians became so bad, the stock as many as 50,000 or 60,000 head of sheep and cattle have been driven there to winter, which they did well, feeding on the grass during the day, and sheltering in the woods about the shepherd's camp at night. Most of the winters there is no snow along the foot of the mountain on the north side of this valley, being sheltered from the north and open to the sun to the south. The United States have established a military post in this valley, not far from the Pass of El Sangre de Christo, and about two hundred families have gone there to live, chiefly near the Fort, and raised crops there last year; and now that they have protection, the valley will soon be all settled, and will be the biggest and best part of New Mexico. About three hundred families more were preparing to move there. The post is called Fort Massachusetts.

This valley has several passes through the Sierra Blanca into the prairie country on the Upper Arkansas and Kanzas, the best of which is called El Sangre de Christo, at the head of the little streams called Cuchadas, which fall into the Huerfano, a small river falling into the Arkansas, not far from Bent's Fort. It is a good Pass, and Bent

and St. Vrain's wagons have passed through it, and it is passable the worst of winters; for Col. Beale's dragoons passed through it the same winter, and nearly the same time, that Col. Fremont went through another Pass further west. The distance through these passes is not more than five miles. This is the description of the country on the east side of the Coo-cha-tope Pass.

On the west side of the Pass the country opens out broad and good for settlements, and for roads, and is the best watered country I ever saw out to the Wah-satch Mountains and to *Las Vegas de Santa Clara.* After that the water and grass become scarce, and the land poor, and it is called desert, though travellers find camping grounds every night; and the great cavalcades of many thousand head of horses from California to New Mexico annually passed along it. After you go through the Pass at the head of the Del Norte, there are many trails bearing Southwest towards the great Spanish trail by Abiquiu, which they join in the forks of the Grand river and Green river, (forks of the great Colorado of the West,) where it is a great beaten road, easy to follow day or night. The country is wooded on the streams with prairies between, and streams every three or five miles, as the great Colorado here gathers its head waters from the Wah-satch and Rocky Mountain ranges, which covered all over with snow in the winter, and have snow upon their tops in the summer, which sends down so much water, and cool, clear and good. And this is the case generally out to the Wah satch Mountains and Las Vegas de Santa Clara—a distance of near five hundred miles from the head of the Del Norte. Wagons can now travel this route to California, and have done it. In the year 1837, two families named Sloover and Pope, with their wagons and two Mexicans, went from Taos that way.

Col. Fremont was looking for the Coo cha-tope Pass in the winter of 1848-9, and was near enough to have seen it, if it had not been hid by the lapping of the mountains, when his guide led him off into the mountains, instead of keeping up the dry valley, which he wished to do, and which would have taken him through easy. It was the worst winter for snow, but we could travel all the time in the valleys and passes. I was below him on the waters of the Arkansas at the same time, acting as guide to Col. Beale, who was out after the Apache Indians with a detachment of dragoons, and we heard of him at the Pueblo's. He went as high as Hard Scrabble and got corn before he crossed into the valley of San Luis, and we got corn at the Greenhorn Pueblo on the San Carlos creek, about 50 or 60 miles below him; and heard that he had passed along, and supposed that he had gone safe through, and knew no better till he got back to Taos, when I told him how near he had been to the place he was looking for. We passed with the dragoons through the Pass El Sangre de Christo, (Blood of Christ,) and got through easy; and that was the dead of winter, and greatest snow we ever had.

There is a way also up the Arkansas to get to the waters of the Great Colorado. It is by Bent's Fort, by the Pueblo's and Hard Scrabble, (at all which places corn and vegetables are raised,) and by Withams's fishery, and at the head of the river, leaving the Three Parks to the north. Horsemen and stock can go that way. Maxwell, of Taos, drove out between four and five thousand head of sheep and cattle last summer, intending to take them to California, but went to the Great Salt Lake, and sold them there.

A wagon can now go from Missouri to California through the Coo cha-tope Pass without crossing any mountain but the Sierra Blanca, (and there have the choice of three good passes,) and without crossing any swamp or large river, and nearly on a straight line all the way, only bearing a little south. And supplies of grain and cattle can be had from the Pueblo's on the Upper Arkansas, and also from the Mexicans in the valley of St. Louis, and also from the Mormons at *Ojo San Jose*, and at their settlement on the Nicollet river, and at Las Vegas de Santa Clara.

I have been from New Mexico to California four times, namely, the way I guided Col. Cook, the way I guided Capt. Sitgreaves, and the Salinas route, and the Abiquiu route; and of these four the one I guided Capt. Sitgreaves is, as I informed Mr. Seward, the best and shortest from from Santa Fe or Albuquerque; but from places further north, and especially from Missouri, the Coo-cha-tope Pass is best and shortest; and has most water, grass, wood, and good land on it; and has most snow, but not enough to prevent winter travelling; so that when there is much snow in the trail by Abiquiu, people from Taos go that way, as I have already said. The snow in that country is dry, and the moccasins that we wear do not get damp or wet.

And being asked by Col. Benton to state the best way from Missouri to California, I answer: Start as the people now do, going to New Mexico, from the frontier of the State at Kanzas or Independence, and for *summer* travelling go through the prairies up

towards Bent's Fort, and up the Huerfano to the Pass El Sangre de Christo; then out by the Coo-cha-tope Pass, following a trail to to the great Spanish trail. The *winter* travel would be to start from the same point, but follow the Kanzas river valley for the sake of the wood, and when that gives out cross to the Arkansas, which is not far off, and level between, and follow that up for wood. The prairie is the way in the *summer*, but *winter* travelling must have the protection of woods and timber against snow storms. And everything that I tell I can show, and would undertake to guide a party safe through with wagons now.

ANTOINE LEROUX.

WASHINGTON CITY, *March* 1, 1853.

Letter from Col. FREMONT *to the Railroad Convention, April,* 1850.

To Messers. B. Gerhard, and others, Committee, &c.

GENTLEMEN: It would have given me great pleasure to have been able to accept your kind invitation, and to have met the interesting Mississippi and Pacific Railroad Convention on Monday, but the remains of a Chagres fever confine me to my room, and leave me no other mode of showing my sense of your attention, and manifesting the interest I take in the great object which assembles this convention, than to contribute, so far as I can, to the mass of information which will be laid before it. In doing this, I regret that the state of my health does not permit even the labor necessary to give the distances and barometrical elevations along the route, which I shall offer for your consideration, but I have caused a skeleton map, rudely sketched, and which, in exhibiting the prominent features of the country and general direction of the line, will be found sufficiently full and accurate to illustrate what I have to say.

Many lines of exploration through the wilderness country from our inhabited frontier, to the Pacific ocean, have conclusively satisfied me that the region or belt of country, lying between the 38th and 39th parallels of latitude, offer singular facilities and extraordinary comparative advantages for the construction of the proposed road.

I propose, therefore, to occupy your attention solely with this line, for the clear understanding of which it will aid to keep under the eye the accompanying map, upon which the unbroken red lines are intended to show that the regions which they traverse have been already explored, while the broken red lines indicate what is known only from reliable information.

The country to be traversed by the proposed road, exhibits but two great features—the prairies, reaching to about the one hundred and fifth degree of longitude, and the mountains with which it is bristling from that point to the shores of the Pacific ocean. Some years of travel among these mountains, during which I was occupied principally in searching for convenient passes and good lines of communication, gradually led me to comprehend their structure, and to understand that among this extended mass of mountains, there is nowhere to be found a great continuous range, having an unbroken crest, where passes are only to be found in the comparatively small depressions of the summit line.

Throughout this great extent of country, stretching in each way about seventeen degrees, all these apparently continuous ranges are composed of lengthened blocks of mountains, separate and detached, of greater or less length, according to the magnitude of the chain they compose—each one possessing its separate, noted and prominent peaks, and lying parallel to each other, but not usually so to the general direction of the range, but in many cases lying diagonally across it, springing suddenly up from the general level of the country; sometimes rising into bare and rocky summits of great height, they leave openings through the range but little above this general level, and by which they can be passed without climbing a mountain. Generally, these openings are wooded valleys, where the mountain springs from either side collect together, forming often the main branches of some mighty stream. Aggregated together in this way, they go on to form the great chains of the Rocky mountains and Sierra Nevada, as well as the smaller and secondary ranges which occupy the intervening space With the gradual discovery of this system, I became satisfied, not only of the entire practicability, but of the easy construction of a railroad across this rugged region. As this peculiarity of the country forms the basis of my information, I desire to state it clearly at the outset, in

order that I may be more readily understood in proceeding to show that this continent can be crossed from the Mississippi to the Pacific, without climbing a mountain, and on the very line which every national consideration would require to connect the great Valley of the West with the Pacific ocean.

In describing the belt of country through which the road should pass, it will be found convenient to divide the entire line into three parts—the eastern, reaching from the mouth of the Kansas to the head of the Del Norte; the middle, from the head of the Del Norte to the rim of the Great Basin; and the western, from the rim of the Great Basin to the ocean. Beginning near the 39th parallel of latitude, at the mouth of the Kansas, the road would extend along the valley of that river some three or four hundred miles, traversing a beautiful and wooded country of great fertility of soil, well adapted to settlement and cultivation. From the upper waters of the Kansas, falling easily over into the valley of the Arkansas, the road strikes that river about a hundred miles below the foot of the mountains, continuing up it only to the mouth of the Huerfano river. From this point, the prairie plains sweep directly up to the mountains, which dominate them as high lands do the ocean. The Huerfano is one of the upper branches of the Arkansas, and following the line of this stream, the road would here enter a country magnificently beautiful, timbered, having many coves or valleys of great fertility; having a mild and beautiful climate; having throughout the valley country short winters, which spend their force in the elevated regions of the mountains. The range of mountains in which this stream finds its head springs, is distinguithed by having its summits almost constantly enveloped in clouds of rain or snow, from which it obtains the name of Sierra Mojada, or Wet mountain. This chain is remarkable among the Rocky mountain ranges for the singular grandeur of its winter scenery, which has been characterized by travelers, who have seen both, as unsurpassed either in the Alps or the Himalays. Their naked, rocky summits are grouped into numerous peaks, which rise from the midst of black piney forests, whence many small streams go to the valley below. Following by an open wagon way, the Valley of the Huerfano, the road reaches the immediate foot of the mountain, at the entrance of a remarkable pass, almost everywhere surrounded by bold, rocky mountain masses. From one foot of the mountain to the other, the pass is about five miles long, a level valley from two to four hundred yards wide, the mountains rising abruptly on either side. With scarcely a distinguishable rise from the river plains, the road here passes directly through or between the mountains, emerging in the Valley of the Del Norte, here some forty or fifty miles broad, or more properly a continuation northward of the valley in which the Del Norte runs. (*This is the Pass El Sangre de Christo—Blood of Christ—in the Sierra Blanca—White Mountain—described in Leraux's statement, but the names of which were unknown to Col. Freemont.*) Crossing this flat country, or opening between the mountains, and encountering no water-course in its way, the road would reach the entrance of a pass in the Colorado mountains, familiarly known to the New Mexican and Indian traders, who are accustomed to traverse it all seasons of the year, and who represent it as conducting to the waters of the Colorado river through a handsome rolling grass-covered country, and affording practicable wagon routes. (*This is the Coo-cha tope Pass described by Mr. Leroux.*)

This section of the route, so far as the entrance to this pass, covering twelve degrees of longitude, I am able to speak of from actual exploration, and to say that the line described is not only practicable, but affords many and singular facilities for the construction of a railway, and offers many advantages in the fertile and wooded country through which it lies in the greater part of its course.

In the whole distance there is not an elevation worthy of the name to be surmounted, and a level of about eight thousand feet is gained without almost perceptible ascent. Up the Kansas and Huerfano river valleys, the country is wooded and watered; the Valley of the Del Norte is open, but wood is abundant in the neighboring mountains, and land fit for cultivation is found almost continuously along the water-courses, from the mouth of the Kansas to the head of the Valley of the Del Norte

A journey, undertaken in the winter of 1848-9, (and interrupted here by entering more to the southward the rugged Mountain of St. John's, one of the most impracticable on the continent,) was intended to make a correct examination of this pass, and the country beyond to the rim of the Great Basin. The failure of this expedition, leaves only for this middle portion of our line such knowledge as we have been able to obtain from trappers and Indian traders. The information thus obtained, had led me to attempt its exploration, as all accounts concurred in representing it practicable for a road; and the information thus obtained was considered to be sufficiently reliable.

(*The statement of Mr. Leroux fills up this gap, and describes this "middle portion;" and confirms the whole view taken of the structure of the mountains, and shows the 500 miles from the head of the Del Norte to Las Vegas de Santa Clara, across the Valley of the Upper Colorado, to be a fine country.*)

According to this information, the same structure of the country to which I have called your attention above, as forming a system among the mountains, holds good; and I accordingly found no difficulty in believing that the road would readily avoid any obstacles which might be presented in the shape of mountain ranges, and easily reach the Basin.

In pronouncing upon the practicability of a road through this section, I proceed upon my general knowledge of the face of the country, upon information received from hunters and residents in New Mexico, and upon the established fact, that it has not only been traveled, but at all seasons of the year, and is one of the travelling routes from New Mexico to California.

The third section of the map is from the Wahsatch mountain to the Sierra Nevada, and thence to the Bay of San Francisco. This route traverses the Great Basin, presenting three different lines, which you will find indicated on the map. Repeated journeys have given me more or less knowledge of the country along these lines, and I consider all of them practicable, although the question of preference remains to be settled. The northern line is that of the Humboldt river, which, although deflecting from the direct course to the Bay, commands in its approach to the mountains several practicable passes, the lowest of which is only 4,500 feet above the sea.

The southern line, which in crossing the Basin has not the same freedom from obstruction enjoyed by the open river line of the North, is still entirely practicable, and possesses the advantage of crossing the Sierra Nevada at a remarkably low depression, called Walker's Pass, more commonly known as the *Point of the Mountains*, and being in fact a termination of one of the mountains which go from that chain.

This pass is near the 35th degree of latitude, and near the head of the beautiful and fertile Valley of the San Joaquin, which the road thence would follow down to its junction with the Sacramento, or to some point on the Bay. This route deflects to the south about as much as the other does to the north, but secures a good way, and finds no obstacle from the Sierra, turning that mountain where it has sunk down nearly to he level of the country. Among the recent proceedings of the California legislature, resolutions were introduced in favor of bringing in the rail-way at this pass.

The third line, which is the middle and direct line, and that to which I gave a decided preference, is less known to me than either of the others; but I believe fully in its practicability, and only see, as the principal obstacle to be overcome, the Great Sierra itself, which it would strike near its centre. That obstacle is not considered insurmountable, nor in the present state of rail-way science, sufficient to turn us from the direct route. A pass is known as indicated by the line upon the map, which labor would render practicable. Other passes are also known to the north and south; and if tunneling becomes necessary, the structure of the mountains is such as to allow tunnels to be used with the greatest advantage. Narrow places are presented where opposite gorges approach each other, and a wall of some two or three thousand feet often separates points which may not be more than a quarter or half of a mile apart at its base. It will also be remembered, that the Great Basin east of the Sierra Nevada has a general elevation of over four thousand feet, so that the mountain would be approached on the east at that elevation; and on the west the slope is wide, though descending to near the level of tide-water.

The foregoing remarks embody all the general information I am now able to give upon this line. The first section of it, from the Missouri frontier to the head of the Del Norte, is explored, and needs no further reconnoisance. It is ready for the location of the road by a practical engineer. The second and third sections require further explorations to determine, not upon practicability, but upon the preference due to one over the others.

A party of three hundred men, skilfully directed, with the assistance of three or four practical road makers, would be sufficient to lay out the whole route, and clear and open a common road in the course of the next spring and summer, so as to be passable for wagons and carriages, and as rapidly traversed as any of the common roads in the United States.

The obstacles which I have not mentioned are, the winter impediment of snows, and the temporary one from the hostility of Indians. The latter can be surmounted by military stations, sending out military patrols to clear and scour the line. The snows

are less formidable than would be supposed, from the great elevation of the central part of the route.

They are dry, and therefore more readily passed through, are thin in the valleys, and remain on them only during a very brief winter. The winter of my last expedition was one of unprecedentedly deep and early snows, yet in the Valleys of the Kanzas and Arkansas, it was thin; in the Valley of Huerfano, none; and in the Valley of Del Norte, at the end of November, but a few inches deep. Even in this severe winter, on the 5th of December, at the greatest elevation crossed by the eastern section of the line—being in the narrow pass between the Arkansas and Del Norte—the snow was only three feet deep; the thermomether at zero near mid-day. The weather in these high mountains and deep valleys is of a character adapted to such localities, extremely cold on the mountains, while temperate in the valleys. I have seen it storming for days together on the mountains, in a way to be destructive to all animal life exposed to it, while in the valley there would be pleasant sunshine, and the animals feeding on nutritious grass. Beyond the Rocky mountains, the cold is less, and the snows become a less and more transient obstacle.

These are my views of a route for the road or roads (a common one is first wanted) from the Mississippi to the Pacific. It fulfils, in my opinion, all the conditions of a route for a national throughfare:

1st. It is direct. The course is almost a straight line from end to end. St. Louis is between 38 and 39; San Francisco is about the same; the route is between these parallels, or nearly between them the whole way.

2d. It is central to territory. It is through the territorial centre west of the Mississippi, and its prolongation to the Atlantic ocean would be central to the States east of that river. It is also central to business and population, and unites the greatest commercial point in the Valley of the Mississippi, with the greatest commercial point on the coast of the Pacific.

3d. It combines the advantages for making and preserving the road—wood, water, and soil, for inhabitation and cultivation.

4th. It is a healthy route. No diseases of any kind upon it; and the valetudinarian might travel it in his own vehicle, on horse, or even on foot, for the mere restoration of health and recovery of spirits.

It not only fulfils all the conditions of a national route, but it is preferable to any other. It is preferable to the South Pass from being near four degrees further south, more free from open plains, and free from the crossing of great rivers. Its course is parallel with the rivers, there being but one (the Upper Colorado) directly crossing its line. There are passes at the head of the Arkansas, in the Three Parks, and north of them, but none equal to this by the Rio del Norte.

In conclusion, I have to say that I believe in the practicability of this work, and that every national consideration requires it to be done, and to be done at once, and as a national work, by the United States.

Your obliged fellow-citizen,

J. C. FREMONT.

These two documents—the letter of Col. Fremont and the statement of Mr. Leroux—establish the facts which are necessary to give the Central route a place in the public mind, and to entitle it to an examination under the act of Congress; and in the meantime to satisfy all inquirers, that this great work is not only practicable but easy, and on the exact line which every national consideration would require it to be upon, and with every advantage of facile construction and universal use. Central to the Union, and embracing the business centres of the Atlantic and Pacific, and the Mississippi valley States—on a straight line with San Francisco and St. Louis, and connecting at this latter point with the concentrated steamboat navigation of the Great West, and with the entire railroad system, from the Mississippi to the Atlantic—straight and smooth—not a mountain to be climbed, a

river or swamp to be crossed, a hill to be tunnelled—wood, water, and soil for continuous settlement—coal known to be on many points of the line—the whole traversable in winter, and all south of 39, 38, and 37 degrees; such is the character of the CENTRAL route, and which now claims a share of the public attention, and of the Congress appropriation. I shall ask for it that justice, and that it may be examined by some practical man whom I can commend, and who will have a stomach to the work, and do it without talk or delay.

Regarding it as certain that the road is to be made, I now add some observations upon its character and construction; believing that erroneous ideas prevail upon these points, which the public good requires to be corrected. I am opposed to all schemes of making a job of the work—against mixing public and private interests—against furnishing the means of making the road to jobbers, and then letting them own it, and charge the people double upon condition of carrying for the Federal Government free. I hold that it should be made by the United States, *so far as their territory extends*, (which would be almost the whole distance on the Central route,) leaving the two ends, where it would go through States, to the operation of State laws and State authority. This would be from the Missouri State line, at the mouth of the Kanzas, to a point on the California State line, opposite the end of the Sierra Nevada at Walker's Pass—a distance of 21½ degrees of longitude, equal to about 1200 miles, (56 miles to a degree in that latitude,) with a southern deflection, as it went west, of three and a half degrees. This would be the main body of the work, leaving the two ends to roads to be made under State authority, and which are already projected, and in some degree commenced both in California and Missouri. In the meantime, and as a permanent help and resource at each end of the road, there is now steamboat transportation of several hundred miles at each end—from San Francisco half way up the San Joaquin, or more; from St. Louis to the mouth of the Kanzas, and up it (as soon as the new Territory is established) several hundred miles further. Stages also, and all the usual land conveyances, would be at each end of the national territorial road.

My idea is, that the road should be built by the United States by the creation of a stock, hypothecated upon the public lands, and payable at a fixed period at the Federal Treasury; and that an adequate force should be put upon it to do the work at once. We think nothing of levying an army of fifty or an hundred thousand men for a war; here is an object of more moment to the United States, and to the WORLD, than many wars; and I should be in favor of seeing an army of laborers employed upon it at once, and the work done in seven years, instead of piddling at it for a lifetime. And why not? We can have the money and the men; and on a line of 1200 miles there would be room for 50,000 men to work without elbowing each other. It would only be forty men to the mile. The pre-emption system would give the

money and the settlers—the right kind of settlers—men who would defend themselves from Indians, and raise provisions for the supply of the road, and occupy it on both sides, and from one end to the other, the first season they were allowed to do so. The Indian title should be extinguished on a breadth of fifty to an hundred miles, and a mile reserved for the different tracks of railroads, and for a common road, and for telegraphic lines. It is a work for posterity, and for three continents; and we should elevate ourselves to the grandeur of the occasion. The main street in the city which Alexander the Great founded to supercede Tyre, in the East India trade, was five miles long and a thousand feet wide, with a colonnaded and covered footway of 100 feet on each side. There were men of ample ideas in those times, and still it was not the age that built the pyramids. "From the summit of those pyramids, said the conqueror of the Mamelukes, forty centuries look down upon us." The time will come when forty centuries may look back upon this road; and they should not be left to repine at the improvidence which would dwindle it to the petty calculations of jobbers, corporators, and speculators.

I repeat; I deem all schemes of making this road by a mixture of public and private means; giving lands or money to companies to make it, and then let them own it; conveying for the United States gratis, and doubling upon the people to make it up; getting, in addition to their other profits, interest upon the cost of construction, and which cost was defrayed by the United States; and all this crowned with a monopoly of the road; I deem all such schemes to be fundamentally unwise, unjust to the community, impolitic, and vicious. I hold that the United States should build the road and the fixtures, and let out the use of it for periods of seven or ten years to contractors, who will carry all freight, public and private, and all passengers, individual and governmental, at the same rate—the lowest responsible bidder to take the contract and furnish his own cars and run them; and if under bid, at the end of his time, or superceded, the successor to take all his stock at valuation.

It is an illusion and a cheat, to suppose that contractors will carry for the United States gratis. They will get their pay somewhere, and ought; and the fair way, and the only intelligible way, and the only way for each party to know what they are about, is for the United States to pay like an individual for all that is done for it. It is the only way to save the people from being oppressed and plundered. Besides, what is the Government—our Government—but the people? Why rob one pocket to put in the other? Why rob individuals in detail, to give to the community as a Government, especially when it is very certain that the individuals double charged will never get back any part of their money? The United States pay their ocean steamers for all they carry, and that enormously, and to the establishment of oppressive monopolies; why not pay their land steamers fairly and equitably, instead of throwing the burden upon the travelling

and the business community? This road is to be a long one, and intended for universal use, and travel and freight upon it should be made as cheap as possible. Besides our own trade, and our travel, the trade and travel of Europe with Asia should go upon it. A free road—that is to say, a road which, like the ocean or a river, charges nothing for its use—is the first great step towards cheap transportation; and for the Government to pay like individuals is the second and completing step to that cheapness.

I now add some notices on the line of country over which this route would pass, with the view of showing the facility of making the road, and the capabilities of the country for continuous, populous, and powerful settlements all along it.

1. The Kanzas River.—Its mouth is in lat. 39, lon. 94½, elevation of the country 700 feet above the level of the Gulf of Mexico Its head is in lat. 39, lon. 103, elevation about 4,000 feet, and its course (the Smoky Hill fork) nearly straight, and skirting the latitude of 39 all the way. It has four forks, all close together, and parallel to each other. It is without falls, and its valley, if that can be called valley, which is nearly on a level with the prairies on each side, is fertile, grassy, and wooded. The two main forks, the Smoky Hill and Republican, (where the United States is now establishing a fort,) is in latitude 39 degrees, 3 minutes, longitude 96 degrees, 24 minutes, elevation 926 feet above the Gulf of Mexico. Fremont describes the two streams (1st of June) as too deep to be forded, and the country as beautifully watered with numerous streams, and handsomely timbered, some of the oaks five or six feet in diameter, the soil a rich, black vegetable mould. Higher up, and half way up the Smoky Hill fork, he describes the country as still assimilating to northwest Missouri, the river having a uniform breadth of 80 to 100 yards, with many small streams falling in, wooded with oak, large elms and the usual varieties of timber common to the lower part of the river. The mouth of the river is in communication with the rich and populous country of Missouri, with supplies of every kind at hand, and transportation easy up the Kanzas river by water, and over the clean level prairies now traversed by annual thousands of wagons.

2. The Upper Arkansas and its valley.—Taking Bent's Fort, near the mouth of the Huerfano, as a point in the line, and its latitude is about 38, longitude 103½, and elevation above 4,000 feet. Its head is about latitude 39, and there are several Pueblo's above, where Indian corn, other grain and vegetables are grown, and cattle, sheep and horses are raised, which shelter and feed themselves all the winter. There is wood upon the river, both above and below the fort, and it is fordable any where for some hundreds of miles. It has the aspect of a settled country, and Fremont speaks of travelling both above and below the fort, "*along a broad wagon road.*" Soil good for cultivation.

3. Huerfano or Orphan River.—The mouth is just above Bent's Fort, and therefore it has about the same geographical position. It comes in from the southwest, and its head is in about latitude $37\frac{1}{2}$, and longitude $105\frac{1}{2}$, elevation not known, but not considerable as it has no falls. It flows through an open country, traversable on a broad space, having the *Sierra Mohada*, or Wet Mountain, on the west, and is the line of approach to the Pass El Sangre de Christo, and others which lead through the Sierra Blanca, (in which it heads,) into the head valley of the Del Norte. Fremont found no snow in this Pass.

4. The valley of St. Louis.—This is the head valley of the Del Norte, about between latitude 37 and 38, and between longitude 105 and 107—elevation not known. Fremont and Leroux both describe it as rich and beautiful, valuable in itself, and the more so as being about half way between St. Louis and San Francisco. The United States have the Fort, (Massachusetts,) in it, and it is filling up with settlers. It must have an area of 5 or 6,000 square miles, is nearly surrounded by grand mountains, and must be one of the finest and most picturesque mountain valleys in the world. Fremont found but little snow in it.

5. The Pass Coo-cha-tope, or El Puerto.—Its latitude is believed to be near 39, longitude about $107\frac{1}{2}$, elevation hardly less than 7,000 feet. It is a continuation of the St. Louis valley, narrowed down to eight miles, level, and no obstruction but a dense forest of large pines. Several trails lead through it, and many from it towards the West. The first western water is the *Rio Compadre*, a branch of the Grand river, or east fork of the Great Colorado. From what Leroux tells me, the whole breadth of eight miles is good for a road, and he himself never followed any particular trail on going through it. It is a magnificent Pass, worthy to be called El Puerto, (The Gate,) and worthy to open the door from the East to the great western slope of the North American continent, and in the right place, and accompanied by all advantages.

From this Pass to the mouth of the Kanzas the face of the country is an inclined plane, level to the eye, but rising under the barometer—the country broad and open, and traversable any where. The coal fields of Missouri are known to extend high up. Fremont says it is ready for the operative engineer to go and lay down the road.

6. The valley of the Upper Colorado.—This large valley lies between the latitudes 37 aud 44, and between longitudes 107 and 113, and is crossed by the Great Spanish Trail probably about latitude 38. Its elevation at the crossing of Green river, the main fork, may be conjectured at between 4 and 5,000 feet, being ascertained by Fremont to be 6,000 feet, where he crossed the same river two or three degrees higher up. It is large enough

for a great State, and has sufficient tillable land, with wood and prairie intermixed, and a milder climate than in corresponding latitudes east of the mountains. It is famous for its many streams of good water, and is not known to present any obstruction to a road. The two principal streams (Green and Grand rivers) are easily passed, the latter usually fordable—the former usually ferried.

7. Las Vegas de Santa Clara.—This will be an important stage in the route, being the terminating point of the good country, and the commencement of what is called the desert; and as such is already settled by the Mormons, as are two other places before you get to it—one, Nicollet's river, the other the *Ojo San José*, spring of St. Joseph. Its latitude, according to Fremont, 37½ degrees, its longitude 115¼, elevation above the sea 5,280 feet. It is described by Fremont as a mountain meadow, rich in bunch grass, and fresh with numerous springs of clear water, all refreshing and delightful to look upon; the meadow, about a mile wide and ten miles long, bordered by grassy hills and mountains, some of them rising two thousand feet, and still white with snow down to the level of the *Vegas*, (May 12,) while the weather was hot in the desert from which he had issued. From this point a pretty stream called the Santa Clara, fork of the *Rio Virgen*, (River of the Virgin,) issues to the south, and reaches the Great Colorado of the west, and has a good cultivation on the lower part of it. From Las Vegas the trail bears southwest to reach Los Angeles, and makes an elbow which it will be necessary to cut off to go nearly due west to Walker's Pass. This desert is above three degrees of longitude in breath—from 115¼ to 118½—and is generally sterile, and deficient in grass and water, though daily camping grounds are found, and the great annual caravans of many thousands of horses from California to New Mexico, were accustomed to travel it. Col. Fremont was sure of finding a direct way across it, and saw at a distance a range of mountains lying east and west, along the southern base of which he *expected* to find wood, water, and soil.

8. Walker's Pass.—This is the south end of the Sierra Nevada, in lat. 35½, and lon. 118½, and opens into the head of the beautiful valley of San Joaquin; and certainly, short of Paradise, there is nothing more sweet and beautiful than the entry into that valley at this Pass. Fremont thus describes it as first seen by him the 14th of April, 1845: "One might travel the world over without finding a valley more fresh and verdant—more floral and sylvan—more alive with birds and animals—more bounteously watered, than we had left in the San Joaquin. The air was filled with perfume as if we were entering a highly cultivated country; and instead of green, our pathway and the mountain sides were covered with fields of yellow flowers, which here was the prevailing color. Gooseberries were nearly ripe. We

were in the midst of an advanced spring. Snow was in sight on the *butte* of the mountain which frowned down upon us on the right; but we beheld it now with feelings of pleasant security, as we rode along between green trees and on flowers, with humming birds and other feathered friends of the traveller enlivening the serene spring air. Taking into consideration the nature of the Sierra Nevada, we found this Pass an excellent one for horses; and with a little labor, or perhaps a more perfect examination of the localities, it might be made sufficiently practicable for wagons. Its elevation was not taken, our half wild cavalcade making troublesome to halt before night when once started." With this Pass, the last obstacle is cleared on this route to San Francisco. The Sierra Nevada is passed; the beautiful valley of San Joaquin is entered; the gold region is almost reached; steamboat navigation is near; a railroad is already projected; you are in *Tulare* county, in the midst of settlements; and can say, I AM IN CALIFORNIA.

Thus, not only the practicability, but the absolute ease of building the railroad to California is demonstrably shown, and through a country all the way good for continuous and populous settlements, and on the very line where every national and commercial consideration would require it to be, and where there is not more snow than in the railroad tracks of New England and New York and Western Pennsylvania; and that dry and light, and readily yielding to the snow plough. A deep dry snow is less impediment to the cars than a thin wet one.

I have mentioned one step taken by Congress at its late session towards the accomplishment of this great object—the appropriation for surveys. I have to mention another which will operate in favor of the Central route—the appropriation for extinguishing Indian titles west of Missouri, and which will free the way from the incumbrances of Indians, and open the land to pre-emption settlers. I was in hopes to have been able to have added a third step in its favor, and the most important of all—that of extending the protection of law and government to the whole country between Missouri and the Rocky Mountains, by establishing the new Territory on the Kanzas and the Grand Platte, and laying it open to settlement this spring; but the bill failed in the Senate, (after having passed the House of Representatives by more than two to one,) not for want of a majority in the Senate in its favor, nor want of time, but because it was not brought forward in time. The Territorial Committee reported it promptly to the Senate, in company with the additional Oregon Territorial bill; but not being called up until near the close of the session, it fell before the kind of opposition which is then always fatal—that of a threatened debate. It will pass at the next session.

I have to regret that there was no appropriation for the construction of a common road from Missouri to California at this sesion. I do not mean to regret the loss of a proposition to give land to

a company to make and protect such a road: on the contrary, I rejoice at the loss of that proposition. If it had passed it would have become the prey of jobbers, and would have ended in cheat, oppression, fraud, and monopoly. The way to make the common road is for the Government to do it by an appropriation of money, and leave its support and protection to the working people who would settle upon it under the pre-emption system. This common road is now a want, and a necessity, for our California, and Oregon emigration. Forty or fifty thousand go annually from the frontiers of Missouri to these Territories, travelling without a tree blazed, or a signpost put up, by the Federal Government—exposed to every species of suffering and danger, and now actually marking out the whole way by the graves of the dead. The Federal Government pays millions for ocean steamers to England, France, Germany, Panama—millions for the protection of foreign commerce upon every sea—keeps a squadron upon the coast of Africa for the protection of the negroes from kidnappers; but it does nothing for a common road upon its own territory from the Mississippi to the Pacific—leaves its citizens to grope their way through the wilderness, guided by the graves of their predecessors, and adding to the number by their own. I will try and do something for this common road next year, and have stages, and horse-mails, and telegraphic lines put upon it for use at once, while building the railroad, to which it would be a great help; for they would run together.

In view of the magnitude of this work—in view of our dominion over the public land from Missouri to California—in view of the immensity of travel and business upon it, great at the start, and to increase for a longer time than the pyramids have stood—I propose to have the plan of this road, or rather systems of roads, on a scale commensurate to its future destiny, be that as great as it may. I propose to reserve a tract a mile wide for all sorts of roads, rail and macadamized, and a plain old English road, such as we have been accustomed to all our lives, on which the farmer in his wagon, or on his horse, and driving his cattle, may go without tax or fear, with none to run over him, or make him jump out of the way under the penalty of being crushed. We shall want tracks for many railways, necessary in future time, and all unconnected and independant of each other. No monopolies on such a mighty line of travel and transportation. Two margins of an hundred feet each should be reserved for independent and rival telegraphic lines.

I have said the public lands on the line of the road will build it. Ten or twelve miles on each side will do it, on the pre-emption principle, $1 25 an acre; and the meritorious settlers upon that principle will be the guard to protect it, the hands to help to make it, and the cultivators to help furnish supplies to the laborers. When done it should be free, that is no tolls upon it—a road of that length will not bear tolls, except slight to keep it in repair—a transit duty on *foreign* commerce—a slight charge

such as all nations exact from *foreign* commerce traversing its territory—would be the proper source for the repairs which would become necessary; and thus Europe would indemnify us for the use of our road.

CITIZENS: It is thirty years since I first began to write and to speak on this subject of American and Asiatic communications, and in favor of a "*North American Road to India;*" and then declared, with the confidence which belongs to conviction founded on evidence, that the road would be made, "*Immediately if aided by the Federal Government, eventually by the progress of events and the force of public opinion even without that aid.*" The time has come for the fulfilment of that confident prediction. Events have advanced beyond my foresight. Not only Oregon, but all California is ours. We hold seventeen degrees of latitude on the western coast of North America, and have a State and a Territory there—great American communities where the idea was ridiculed when I first came to Congress. Public opinion is now declared—has become universal—and is triumphant. Congress is begining to move under its stimulus; politicians are putting their shoulders to the wheel. But what is more than Congress and the politicians, is the PEOPLE and the BUSINESS POWER of the Union. Both these great springs of action are for the road, and not in the west alone, but out to the Atlantic shore; and thus a sense of interest combines with national considerations in stimulating its construction.

Behold the extended and ramified system of railways from the Mississippi to the Atlantic! What is it but an expanded fan! the top on the Atlantic coast, the spokes converging to St. Louis! and the road to San Francisco the handle to that fan, in the extension of which every western and every Atlantic road would find its own participation in the splendid commerce of Western America and Eastern Asia.

THOMAS H. BENTON.

WASHINGTON, *March* 4, 1853.

APPENDIX.

I add to this letter some brief extracts, from former writings and speeches on this subject, for the purpose of giving some views of the history of the East India trade, and of its influence in promoting the wealth and power, the civilization and refinement, and the arts, sciences and literature of every country that ever possessed it, or through whose dominions it passed. The object of the road to the Pacific is twofold, *first*, to connect our Atlantic and Pacific dominions; and, *secondly*, to turn the commerce of the EAST through our country, and secure to ourselves the advantages of so great an acquisition. The extracts given apply to this latter object, and therefore become a natural appendix to the letter, which confines itself chiefly to the construction of the road, and its necessity to our internal communications.

(A.)

I.—NORTH AMERICAN ROAD TO INDIA.

Extracts from essays written and published at St. Louis, in 1819, *by Thomas H. Benton.*

OREGON.—ASIATIC COMMERCE.

I. *Commerce with Asia.*—Spices, aromatics, precious stones, porcelains, cottons, silks, and teas, are the articles of Asiatic commerce. Silver and gold are the articles with which they are purchased. From the earliest ages of the world, the precious metals have flowed into Asia; and this drain, which has been incessant for several thousand years, has become still more enormous in latter times.

The American navigator sails to the east, traverses 30,000 miles of sea, doubles a stormy and tempestuous cape, in order to arrive in what is called the East Indies. In the meantime, what was the EAST Indies to the ancients are the WEST Indies to the Americans; for they lie to the west of us, and but a few days' sail from our own coast. The western shore of North America and the eastern shore of Asia front each other—the mild and tranquil waves of the Pacific ocean alone intervene—in the broadest part as narrow as the Atlantic, and in the narrowest, at Behring's Straits, only thirty miles apart. Instead of going to the East, Americans should therefore go to the west to arrive in Asia; and taking that route, they would immediately be able to carry furs and bread into the markets of Asia, the first of which is now pillaged from them by Englishmen and Russians, the latter would have to be raised from the fertile banks of the Columbia river.

II. *Sought after by all nations.*—During thirty centuries the nations of the earth have flocked to Asia in search of its rich commerce. Sacred and profane history exhibit the same picture, of merchants loaded with gold and silver, traversing the deserts on camels, or the trackless sea in ships in search of the rich productions of the east. From the time of the Phœnicians to the English of the present day, the countries of eastern Asia have been the chief theatres of commercial enterprise; and the nation which shared this commerce in the highest degree, has acquired in all ages the first rank in the arts, the sciences, in national power and individual wealth. And such will probably be the case to the end of the world. Nature has made but one Asia, but one country abounding with the rich productions which are found in the East Indies; and while mankind continue to love spices and aromatics, precious stones, porcelains, fine cottons, silks and teas, the trade with Asia, must contine to be sought after as the brightest jewel in the diadem of commerce.

III. *Ancient channels of this commerce.*—These may be traced by the ruins of the great cities which grew up with the possession of this trade, and perished with its loss.

Tyre, "*Queen of Cities,*" was its first emporium. The commerce of the east centered there before the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, upwards of six hundred years before the coming of Christ, (*Rollin.*) She traded to Arabia, Persia, and India. Her

route was by the Mediterranean Sea to the coast of Egypt, over land to the Red Sea by the Isthmus of Suez, down the Red Sea, and thence east by coasting voyages to the countries about the Gulf of Persia and moutns of the river Indus. The possession of this commerce made Tyre the richest and the proudest city in the universe; gave her the command of the seas; "*made her traffickers the honorables of the earth,*" (*Isaiah,*) and enabled her merchants to dispute with kings in the splendor of their living and the vastness of their expenses. Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, conquered Tyre, and razed it to its foundations; but he did not found a rival city, and the continuance of the Indian trade immediately restored the "*Queen of Cities*" to all her former degrees of power and pre-eminence. Alexander conquered her again, founded a rival city on the coast of Egypt, and Tyre became "a place for fishermen to dry their nets," (*Ezekiel.*)

The Jews, in the time of David and Solomon, succeeded to the India trade. Their route was the same which the Phœnicians followed from Tyre, and their country became the theatre of wealth, and their kings the arbiters of surrounding nations.

In the reign of Darius Hystaspes, King of Persia, a new route was opened with India. It lay from the borders of Persia through the Caspian Sea, up the river Oxus to the mountains which divide it from the river Indus, across those mountains with the aid of the Bactrian camel, and thence down the river Indus to the countries about its mouth, then the chief seat of the India trade, and the limit of the ancients in their trade to the east. This route covered a distance of three thousand miles: six hundred on the Caspian Sea, nine hundred on the Oxus, two or three hundred overland crossing the mountains, and about twelve hundred on the river Indus.

The foundation of Alexandria created a new emporium, and opened a new route for the commerce of the east, chosen with so much judgment, that it continued to be followed from the time of Alexander the Great, upwards of 300 years before Christ, till the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope in the fifteenth century. This channel was along the canal of Alexandria to the Nile, up the Nile to Coptus, thence across the desert with camels to the Red Sea, and thence a coasting voyage to the mouths of the Indus. The Romans, in the flourishing times of the republic and of the empire, derived their supplies of India goods through this channel.

In the same age another channel was opened with India. It lay overland, across the desert, from the bottom of the Mediterranean Sea to the river Euphrates, down that river to the Gulf of Persia, and thence by the usual coasting voyage to the mouths of the Indus. The distance between the sea and the Euphrates (two hundred miles) required a station between them. It was found in a grove of palm trees; a fertile spot, well watered, in the midst of sands, about midway between the sea and the river. Its inhabitants entered with ardor in the trade of conveying commodities from the river to the sea. As the most valuable productions of India, brought up the Euphrates from the Persian Gulf, were of such small bulk as to bear the expense of a long land carriage, this trade soon became so considerable that the opulence and power of Palmyra increased rapidly. (*Robertson.*) Its government was best suited to the genius of a commercial city—REPUBLICAN. (*Pliny the Elder.*) This spot then began to exhibit the wonders of which commerce is capable. From a trading station, it became an opulent city, the capital of a great empire, the seat of science and the arts, the rival of Rome. Rome would bear no rival. One of the most powerful of the emperors (Aurelian) carried the arms of the empire against the "*City of Commerce.*" Palmyra was subdued; its trade diverted to other channels; and the ruins of temples arrest the admiration of the traveller on the spot which was once the seat of so much power and magnificence. (*Volney.*)

After the conquest of Egypt by the Mahomedans, the people of the Roman empire were shut out from the port of Alexandria. This gave rise to the opening of a new channel for the India trade. Constantinople became its emporium. This route lay through the Black Sea to the mouth of the river Phasis; up that river and by a land carriage of five days to the river Cyrus, down it to the Caspian Sea; across this sea three hundred miles, to the mouth of the river Oxus; up that river nine hundred miles, to the city of Marcanda, (once Alexandria,) now Samarcand; thence across the mountains to the countries upon the river Indus, or eastward by a journey of eighty or a hundred days, with the Bactrian camel, through desert countries and wandering nations which considered the merchant as their prey, to the western provinces of the Chinese empire, (*Pliny the Elder.*) This route, though long and perilous, made Constantinople the emporium of the India trade for all Christian nations for several centuries after the conquest of Egypt by the Mahomedans, and made it the seat of wealth and power for many ages after the downfall of the Roman empire.

IV. *Modern channels.*—Constantinople continued to be the emporium of the India trade till the fifteenth century. The Venetians and Genoese engaged in it. They established trading houses in Constantinople, and rose to power and pre-eminence from the profits of this trade. Their fleets commanded the seas, at a time when fleets were yet unknown to the rest of Europe, and the citizens of these republics displayed a magnificence in their living, which surpassed the state of the greatest monarchs beyond the Alps, (*Robertson.*) From Venice and Genoa the commerce of Asia spread into the north of Europe. Burges and Antwerp became its *emporia,* and retain to this day evident signs of the wealth and splendor to which they attained. This was the longest and most perilous route over which the commerce of India has been conducted. It is truly astonishing to think of it. From Burges and Antwerp to Genoa and Venice, thence to Constantinople, across the Black Sea, across the Caspian Sea, up the river Oxus to Samarcand, the limit of Alexander's march towards the northeast of Asia: and at Samarcand it seemed that the journey was only beginning, as there commenced the voyage overland with the Bactrian camel, through desert regions and nations of robbers, to be continued from eighty to a hundred days to arrive in the western provinces of China, where the most valuable productions of the east were then found. Yet so great were the profits the trade, that, under all these disadvantages, the cities of Constantinople, of Venice, of Genoa, of Burges and Antwerp, become the seats of learning and refinement, of luxury and magnificence, of maritime and military power, when all other parts of Europe were sunk in poverty and ignorance, darkness and barbarism.

Towards the end of the 15th century, the Cape of Good Hope was doubled. A new route was then opened into India. The Portuguese, who made this discovery, became the masters of the India trade, destroyed the fleets of the Turks and Venitians which were launched upon the Red Sea to keep open the ancient channel through Egypt, and established a commercial empire in India. Portugal then became one of the most powerful nations by sea and land, and Lisbon the centre of European wealth and commerce.

The passage by the Cape of Good Hope (sometimes by Cape Horn) has since continued to be the route to India.

The Portuguese did not long retain their monopolies. The Dutch became their competitors, and soon after their successor in the India trade. Portugal declined to its original insignificance. Holland rose to wealth and power by sea and land, and Amsterdam became the principal mart of Europe.

The English followed the Dutch, and have surpassed all their predecessors in the successful prosecution of the India trade. A company of their merchants have erected an empire in India, maintained fleets and armies, subjugated vast empires, dethroned powerful monarchs, disposed of kingdoms and principalities as other merchants dispose of bales of metchandise; and with the the riches thence derived, England (a spot no larger than one of our States) has been able to contend single handed against the combined powers of Europe, to triumph over them, and to impress her policy, more or less, upon every quarter of the globe.

One other route, among the modern channels of commerce, remains to be mentioned. It is the line followed by the Russians from the city of Moscow to the frontiers of China. By this route the Russians carry on a trade with China worth three or four millions of dollars per annum, in which the productions of the respective countries are bartered against each other, almost the only instance of trade by barter which any nation has carried on with the people of the east, but sufficient to show that there are articlee for which the Chinese will barter the rich productions of their country. This route is often made entirely over land, and is then upwards of six thousand miles in length; sometimes by the river Wolga, the Caspian Sea, and the river Oxus, and thence over land by the ancient route from Constantinople, which increases the distance but relieves in some degree the labor of the voyage by substituting for a part of the way water for land carriage.

Servilely following the Europeans in almost everything, the people of the United States also follow them in their route to India. They quit Asia as it were, leave it behind them, to sail thirty thousand miles, doubling a formidable cape and braving the dangers of a tempestuous sea, to arrive in a country which is only a few days' sail from their own continent. They do this because the people of Europe, who can do no better, have done so before them. In the meantime the efforts of the English to discover a northwest passage to Asia, should convince them that even the Europeans would not submit to circumnavigate the globe in their voyage to India, if a western route could be found through, or around, the northern parts of the American continent. Still, with all the dangers added to the length of the voyage, the East India trade is the richest vein

of American commerce, and soonest leads to the most splendid fortunes; convincing proof of what it would be if a new route was opened, exclusively American, short, safe, cheap, and direct, and substituting a trade in barter for the present ruinous drain of gold and silver.

V. *New route proposed for the people of the United States by the Columbia and Missouri rivers.*—Columbus was the first who conceived the idea of going west to arrive at the East Indies. His discovery of America was owing to that idea. He was in search of a western passage to the eastern coast of Asia when he was arrested by the unexpected intervention of the American continent. Nor had he any idea that he had found a new world. He believed himself on the coast of India, and under that belief gave the name of Indians to the inhabitants; a name which they have retained ever since, although the error on which it was founded has been long since exploded. (*Robertson.*)

La Salle, founder of the French colony in the valley of the Mississippi—a man pronounced by Mr. Adams to be second only to Columbus in the list of great discoverers—was the next who cherished the idea of going west to india. The French were then masters of the Canadas, and were daily extending their discoveries to the interior of North America. The existence of a chain of great lakes stretching westward being ascertained, he believed that an inland passage to China might be discovered by means of these lakes and the rivers flowing into the Pacific ocean. (*Stoddart.*) Full of this idea, he left Montreal about the year 1680, in the hope of immortalizing himself by opening to his country a new and direct route to the commerce of the East Indies. Parting from his friends eight miles above Montreal, the last word he said to them was China, and the spot retains the name (*La Chine*) ever since. But death arrested him in the valley of the Arkansas, the fate which Columbus had so narrowly escaped, that of being assassinated by his own followers, who had not courage to follow him any further.

The English, of all others the most avaricious of the India trade, also turned their views to the discovery of a western passaga to Asia. A passage round the American continent above Hudson's Bay, was for a long time a favorite object with the English Government, and still occupies its attention. Numerous squadrons had been fitted out, and repeatedly attempted the passage, sometimes from the northwest by Behring's Straits, sometimes by the northeast through Hudson's Bay and Davis's Straits. The multiplied efforts to discover this passage show the value which the English place on the discovery of a direct route to Asia. But they have not confined themselves to sea voyages. Taking up the idea of La Salle, they have sought an inland passage by means of rivers and lakes. This project was entrusted to McKenzie. Confined to the northern parts of our continent, he could only prosecute his discoveries north of the heads of the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. He was confined to high northern latitudes, but succeeded in showing the existence of a water communication, with a few portages, from Hudson's Bay, north latitude 55 to the Pacific ocean in the north latitude 46. The Mississippi, the Peace river, the Columbia, and some lakes, formed the means of this communication, and little useful as it would seem to us in a latitude so high, it was deemed a discovery of great moment by the English. McKenzie received the honor of knighthood for his enterprise; the British fur traders immediately began to export their furs to China by the direct route of the Columbia, and the privilege of navigating that river for ten years has been secured to them by treaty.

The Missouri above the Mandan villages was yet unknown. From the mouth of the Mississippi a man of genius projected its discovery. In 1796 the Baron de Carondelet, Governor General of Louisiana, planned an expedition to the sources of the Missouri, and thence to the Pacific ocean. He obtained the approbation of Charles IV, King of Spain. A liberal compensation was offered by the King, and the Baron announced an additional reward of three thousand dollars to the persons who should first see the great ocean. The expedition was undertaken by Don Jacques Clamorgan, an enterprising citizen of St. Louis, who proscuted it some distance up the Missouri at great expense, but without accomplishing the views of the Spanish Government.

A few years after, Louisiana changed its master. The eyes of Mr. Jefferson, taking the direction of so many eminent men, were turned upon the Pacific ocean, and under his auspices the labors of Lewis and Clark have demonstrated the existence of a water communication, with a few portages, through the heart and centre of the Republic from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The rivers Columbia, Missouri, and Ohio, form this line, and open a channel to Asia, short, direct, safe, cheap, and exclusively American, which invites the enterprise of Anerican citizens, and promises to them a splendid participation in the commerce of the East.

(B.)

EXTRACT *from the speech in the Senate, February*, 1849, *in favor of a National Central Highway from the Mississippi to the Pacific:*

Nothing, Mr. President, is more essential than roads. It is an old theme, sir; but it will bear the suggestion that no civilized people can live without roads, and that it is the indispensable duty of every nation which has acquired any new possessions to open communication with it. We know that the Romans—from whom we borrowed so many of our ideas, useful or grand—never considered a conquered territory added to the republic or the empire until it was perforated by a road. There was no annexation in their idea until there was communication. The idea was well founded, sir, and one which we can practically carry out. Large and grand as our project of roads seems, from the Mississippi to the Pacific, and a mile in width reserved for many tracks—it is almost insignificant compared to the roads of the Roman empire. Her territory was not greater than ours—not so compact—her population not so homogeneous as ours, nor at the greatest as great as ours will be in the lifetime of the child now born; and yet her roads far transcended in length and number anything that we now propose. Here is what Gibbon says. After enumerating the four thousand cities belonging to the Roman empire in Europe, Asia, and Africa, he goes on to say:

"All these cities were connected with each other, and with the capital, by the public highways, which, issuing from the forum of Rome, traversed Italy, prevaded the provinces, and were terminated only by the frontiers of the empire. If we carefully trace the distance from the wall of Antoninus to Rome, and from thence to Jerusalem, it will be found that the great chain of communication, from the northwest to the southeast point of the empire, was drawn out to the length of four thousand and eighty Roman miles. The public roads were usually divided by mile-stones, and ran in a direct line from one city to another, with very little respect for the obstacles either of nature or private property. Mountains were perforated, and bold arches thrown over the broadest and most rapid streams. The middle part of the road was raised into a terrace which commanded the adjacent country, consisted of several strata of sand, gravel, and cement, and was paved with large stones, or in some places, near the capital, with granite. Such was the solid construction of the Roman highways, whose firmness has not entirely yielded to the effort of fifteen centuries. They united the subjects of the most distant provinces by an easy and familiar intercourse; but their primary object had been to facilitate the marches of the legions; nor was any country considered as subdued, till it had been rendered, in all its parts, pervious to the arms and authority of the conquerer. The advantage of receiving the earliest intelligence, and of conveying their orders with celerity, induced the Emperors to establish throughout their extensive dominions the regular institution of posts. Houses were everywhere erected at the distance only of five or six miles; each of them was constantly provided with forty horses, and by the help of these relays, it was easy to travel an hundred miles in a day along the Roman roads. The use of the posts was allowed to those who claimed it by an imperial mandate; but, though originally intended for the public service, it was sometimes indulged to the business or conveniency of private citizens."

Such was the extent and solidity of the Roman roads—a single line of road above 4,000 Roman, and equal to 3,740 English miles—and the 4,000 cities of the empire all connected with roads of equal solidity besides. The road which we propose is only half the length of one chain of theirs. I mention them for their magnificence—their grandeur—and as presenting an example worthy of our imitation. The road I propose is necessary to us, and now. We want it now. The state of our possessions on the Pacific demands it. The time to begin has arrived. All the necessary information is on hand. The means are ready. The title to Oregon is settled, and a government established there, and population is growing up. California is acquired: people are there: and a government must follow. We have a fleet on that coast—troops there, and going. Streams of population are concentrating there. Since the discovery of the New World by Columbus there has not been such an unsettling of the foundations of society. Not merely individuals and companies, but communities and nations are in commotion, all bound to the setting sun—to the gilded horizon of Western America. For want of an American road, they seek foreign routes, far round, by sea and land, to reach by an immense circuit what is a part of their own land. Until we can get a road of our own, we must use and support a foreign route; but that is a temporary resource, demanded by the exigency of the times, and until we can get our own ready. Never

did so great an object present itself to the acceptance of a nation. We own the country from sea to sea—from the Atlantic to the Pacific—and upon a breadth equal to the length of the Mississippi—and embracing the whole temperate zone. Three thousand miles across, and half that breadth, is the magnificent parallelogram of our domain. We can run a national central road through and through, the whole distance, under our flag and under our laws. Military reasons require us to make it: for troops and munitions must go there. Political reasons require us to make it: it will be a chain of union between the Atlantic and Pacific States. Commercial reasons demand it from us: and here I touch a boundless field, dazzling and bewildering the imagination from its vastness and importance. The trade of the Pacific Ocean, of the western coast of North America, and of Eastern Asia, will all take its track; and not only for ourselves, but for posterity. That trade of India which has been shifting its channels from the time of the Phœnicians to the present, is destined to shift once more, and to realize the grand idea of Columbus. The American road to India will also become the European track to that region. The European merchant, as well as the American, will fly across our continent on a straight line to China. The rich commerce of Asia will flow through our centre. And where has that commerce ever flowed without carrying wealth and dominion with it? Look at its ancient channels, and the cities which it raised into kingdoms, and the populations which upon its treasures became resplendent in science, learning, and the arts. Tyre, Sidon, Balbec, Palmyra, Alexandria, among its ancient emporiums, attest the power of this commerce to enrich, to aggrandize, and to enlighten nations. Constantinople, in the middle ages, and in the time of the crusades, was the wonder of Western Europe; and all, because she was then a thoroughfare of Asiatic commerce. Genoa and Venice, mere cities, in later time, became the match of kingdoms, and the envy of kings, from the mere divided streams of this trade of which they became the thoroughfare. Lisbon had her great day, and Portugal her pre eminence during the little while that the discovery of the Cape of Good Hope put her in communication with the East. Amsterdam, the city of a little territory rescued from the sea, and the Seven United Provinces, not equal in extent to one of our lesser States, became great in arms, in letters, in wealth, and in power; and all upon the East India trade. And London, what makes her the commercial mistress of the world—what makes an island no larger than one of our first class States—the mistress of possessions in the four quarters of the globe—a match for half of Europe—and dominant in Asia? What makes all this, or contributes most to make it, but this same Asiatic trade? In no instance has it failed to carry the nation, or the people which possessed it, to the highest pinnacle of wealth and power, and with it the highest attainments of letters, arts, and sciences. And so will it continue to be. An American road to India, through the heart of our country, will revive upon its line all the wonders of which we have read—and eclipse them. The western wilderness, from the Pacific to the Mississippi, will start into life under its touch. A long line of cities will grow up. Existing cities will take a new start. The state of the world calls for a new road to India, and it is our destiny to give it—the last and greatest. Let us act up to the greatness of the occasion, and show ourselves worthy of the extraordinary circumstances in which we are placed, by securing while we can an American road to India—central and national—for ourselves and our posterity—now, and hereafter, for thousands of years to come.

(C.)

Extract from Senator Benton's speech in the Senate, 1850.

There is an idea become current of late—a new-born idea—that none but a man of science, bred in a school, can lay off a road. That is a mistake. There is a class of topographical engineers older than the schools, and more unerring than the mathematics. They are the wild animals—buffalo, elk, deer, antelope, bears, which travese the forest, not by compass, but by an instinct which leads them always the right way—to the lowest passes in the mountains, the shallowest fords in the rivers, the richest pastures in the forest, the best salt springs, and the shortest practicable lines between remote points. They travel thousands of miles, have their annual migrations backwards and forwards, and never miss the best and shortest route. They are the first engineers to lay

out a road in a new country; the Indians follow them, and hence a buffalo road becomes a war-path. The first white hunters follow the same trails in pursuing their game; and after that the buffalo road becomes the wagon road of the white man, and finally the macadamized or railroad of the scientific man. It all resolves itself into the same thing—into the same buffalo road; and thence the buffalo becomes the first and safest engineer. Thus it has been here, in the countries which we inhabit, and the history which is so familiar.

I have demonstrated the nationality of this work—its practicability—and the means in our hands for making it; I do not expatiate upon its importance. When finished it will be the American road to Asia, and will turn the Asiatic commerce of Europe through the heart of our America. It will make us the mistress of that trade—rich at home and powerful abroad—and reviving a line of oriental and almost fabulous cities to stretch across our continent—Tyres, Sidons, Palmyras, Balbees. Do we need any stimulus for the undertaking? Any other nation, upon half a pretext, would go to war for the right of making it, and tax unborn generations for its completion. We have it without war, without tax, without treaty with any Power; and when we make it all nations must travel it—with our permission—and behave themselves to receive permission. Besides riches and power, it will give us a hold upon the good behavior of nations by the possession which it will give us of a short, safe, and cheap road to India.

The work is great, but nothing compared to our means, and to the magnitude of the object, or to what was done by the Incas of Peru before the New World was discovered. Their two roads from Quito to Cuzco (to say nothing of many shorter ones) were each nearly as long, both over more difficult ground, equal in amount of labor required, and more commodious than the proposed system of roads from the Mississippi to the Pacific ocean. One of our classic historians (Prescott) thus describes them:

"There were many of the roads traversing different parts of the kingdom; but the most considerable were the two which extended from Quito to Cuzco, and again diverging from the capital, continued in a southern direction towards Chili. One of these roads passed over the grand plateau, and the other along the lowlands on the borders of the ocean. The former was much the most difficult achievement, from the character of the country. It was conducted over pathless sierras buried in snow; galleries were cut for leagues through the living rock; rivers were crossed by means of bridges that swung suspended in the air; precipices were scaled by stair ways hewn out of the native bed; ravines of hideous depth were filled up with solid masonry; in short, all the dificulties that beset a wild and mountainous region, and which might appal the most courageous engineers of modern times, were encountered and successfully overcome. The length of the road, of which scattered fragments only remain, is variously estimated, from fifteen hundred to two thousand miles; and some pillars, in the manner of European milestones, were erected at stated intervals of somewhat more than a league, all along the route. Its breadth scarcely exceeded twenty feet. It was built of heavy flags of freestone, and, in some parts at least, covered with bituminous cement, which time has made harder than the stone itself. In some places where the ravines had been filled up with masonry, the mountain torrents, wearing it for ages, have gradually eaten a way through the base, and left the superincumbent mass—such is cohesion of the material—still spanning the valley like an arch. Over some of the boldest streams it was necessary to construct supension bridges, as they are termed, made of the tough fibres of the maguey, or of the osier of the country, which has an extraordinary degree of tenacity and strength. These osiers were woven into cables of the thickness of a man's body. The huge ropes, then stretched across the water, were conducted through rings or holes cut in immense buttresses of stone raised on the opposite banks of the river, and there secured to heavy pieces of timber. Several of these enormous cables, bound together, formed a bridge, which, covered with planks, well secured and defended by a railing of the same osier materials on the sides, afforded a safe passage for the traveller."

"The other road of the Incas lay trough the level country between the Andes and the ocean. It was constructed in a different manner, as demanded by the nature of the ground, which was for the most part low, and much of it sandy. The causeway was raised on a high embankment of earth, and defended on either side by a porapet, or wall of clay; and trees and odoriferous shrubs planted along the margin, regaling the sense of the traveler with their perfumes, and refreshing him by their shades, so grateful under the burning sky of the tropics. All along these highways, caravanserai's were erected at the distance of ten or twelve miles for the accomodatton of travelers,

militarily constructed for security, and supplied with water brought in aqueducts when not found at the place. Couriers, in relieves, and running swiftly, carried, dispatches the whole extent of these long routes at the rate of one hundred and fifty miles a day; and, besides dispatches, often carried fish from the distant ocean, and fruits and game from the hot regions on the coast, to be served up fresh at the Inca's table in the imperial capitals."

The Baron Humbolt "*the Nestor of Scientific Travellers,*" thus speaks of the remains of the same roads from his own personal observation:

"As we were leading our heavily laden mules with great difficulty through the marshy ground on the elevated plain del Pullal, our eyes meanwhile were continually dwelling on the grand remains of the Inca's road, which, with a breadth of twenty-one English feet, was there remaining by our side. It had a deep understructure, and was paved with well cut blocks of blackish trap-porphry. Nothing that I had seen of the remains of Roman roads in Italy, in South of France, and in Spain, was more imposing than those works of the ancient Peruvians, which are situated, according to my barometric measurment, 13,258 English feet above the level of the sea—or more than a thousand feet higher than the summit of the Peak of Teneriffe. There are two great artificial paved roads, or system of roads, covered with flat stones, or sometimes even with cemented grapel; one passes through the wide and arid plain, between the Pacific ocean and the chain of the Andes, and the other over the ridges of the Cordilleras. Milestones, or stones marking the distances, are often placed at equal intervals. The road was conducted across rivers and deep ravines by three kinds of bridges—stone, wood, and rope bridges; and there were also aqeducts for bringing water to the resting places (caravansaries) and to the fortresses. Both systems of roads were directed to the central point, Cuzco, the seat of government of the great empire, in 12° 31′ south latitude, and which is placed, according to Pentland's map of Bolivia, 13,378 English feet above the level of the sea. The two important capitals of the empire, Cuzco and Quito, thus connected by two different systems of roads, are 1000 English geographical miles apart, in a straight line—(S. S. E. N. N. W.)—without reckoning the many windings of the way; and, including the windings, the distance is estimated by Garcilasso de la Vega and other conquistadores at 500 leagues."

Such were the roads constructed on our own continent before the discovery of the New World, and by a people whom we consider uncivilized, and who certainly had but few of the helps of civilization—no knowledge of iron—no mechanical powers—no beast of burden but a sort of a sheep—the lama—too light for the draught, and too weak for the burden—only carrying an hundred pounds ten miles in a day; and yet a people who constructed two such roads, each near about as long as from Missouri to the Pacific—one at a mountainous elevation only about a thousand feet lower than the summit of Mont Blanc, and the other in the arid sands of the lowlands, under a tropical heat, and both in a direction to cross successive mountains or rivers, and both executed in a style of accomodation that we do not pretend to rival: military protection, safe lodging, water, shade, baths, the perfume of odoriferous shrubs! and mails, messages, and small burdens transported upon them at the rate of one hundred and fifty miles a day, without horses and without steam, by men running on foot alone. After seeing such a system of roads on our own continent, devised and established by such a people, what is there to prevent us, the vanguard of the Anglo-Saxon race, and the descendants of the *elite* of Europe, to open the system of roads which my bill proposes—a common road, on which the mail stage is to run one hundred miles in the twenty-four hours, and a letter horse mail two hundred miles in the same time—a railway on which the cars are to fly, like the express trains in England, forty-two miles to the hour—an electric line, along which, and across the continent, people are to communicate as they would hold converse across a room?